NORFOLK ISLAND — THE FIRST PHASE

by

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We are all aware of the haste with which Norfolk Island was settled after the arrival of the "First Fleet" at Sydney Cove in January, 1788. Some of us have wondered, no doubt, why this was so; what motivated the British government to instruct Phillip to colonise Norfolk Island "as a spot which may hereafter become useful"? (1)

In the first place we could ascertain what the original European discoverer of the island had to say. The success of Cook's first expedition had led to increased British interest in the Pacific and he was commissioned to lead a further expedition; a voyage of geographical discovery.

The experiences with *Endeavour* in the first voyage had justified Cook's choice of vessel and two Whitby built barks were purchased by the Navy Board; *Resolution* (462 tons) and *Adventure* (340 tons). The near disasters which *Endeavour* had undergone so far from any possible assistance had indicated the need for two ships as support for each other during any voyage of long duration in unexplored waters. Cook sailed in *Resolution* and Tobias Furneaux had command of *Adventure*. After over a year in company bad weather separated the vessels and *Adventure*, arriving at Queen Charlotte Sound, New Zealand, after Cook had left there for Antarctica, sailed south and made her way back to England. Cook carried on with his exploration into Antarctica. After a short spell in warmer waters he sailed in again and on 30th January, 1774 reached his farthest point south. From here he sailed north and west and after calling at various islands discovered New Caledonia in September, 1774. In the latter part of that month at the southernmost end of New Caledonia he discovered the Isle of Pines of which he had to say "If I except New Zealand, I know of no island in the South Pacifick Ocean where a ship could supply herself with a Mast or a Yard, was she ever so much distress'd for

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want of one; nay you cannot even get a Studing-sail boom of wood attall fit for the purpose much less a lower mast or yard; thus far the discovery may be both useful and valuable." (2)

Then, having sailed south from New Caledonia, on 10th October, 1774 Cook discovered in position 29°00'S 168°16'E (modern calculation 29°02'S 167°57'E) an "Isle". Cook was keeping, of course, nautical time (noon to noon) and his discovery was made at daybreak. After dinner on 11th October (about 7 hours later) Cook reports — ". . . hoisted our two boats in which myself, some of the officers and gentlemen went to take a view of the Island and its produce, we found no difficulty in landing behind some rocks which lined part of the coast and defended it from the surf. We found the Island uninhabited and near a kin to New Zealand, the Flax plant, many other Plants and Trees common to that country was found here but the chief produce of the isle is Spruce Pines which grow here in vast abundance and to a vast size, from two to three feet diameter and upwards, it is of a different sort to those in New Caledonia and also to those in New Zealand and for Masts, Yards & Ca superior to both. We cut down one of the Smallest trees we could find and Cut a length of the uper and to make a Topgt Mast or Yard. My Carpenter tells me that the wood is exactly of the same nature as the Quebeck Pines. Here then is a nother Isle where Masts for the largest Ships may be had". (3)

NAVAL INTEREST IN PINE

Cook's reference to the flax plant and the mast timber illustrates a pre-occupation which had bedevilled naval administrators from the time of Pepys or even earlier. As British sea-power waxed so did the logistic problems. When in 1675 Pepys was putting the case for new ships to the House of Commons he was against the building all at once of the twenty ships proposed because of the dearth of plank both at home *and abroad*. Timber would have to be felled and to build twenty ships in the next year as members proposed, must be to build them all of green timber. They must be built over a number of years to avoid this. (4)

Yet by 1686 due to the maladministration of the old Navy Board the new construction of the late 1670's lay rotting at their moorings at Chatham. A special commission was set up to bring about restoration. The testimony of a delegation of leading Thames shipbuilders vindicated Secretary Pepys from the charge of having built the ships from inferior foreign timber. Their testimony established it beyond question that for vessels of over 300 tons burthen Prussian and Bohemian plank was cheaper, more reliable and more enduring than English. This was confirmed officially

by the Privy Council when the King (James II) after studying the evidence declared himself "convinced of the safety, benefit and present necessity of making use of plank of foreign growth". The royal declaration left the Special Commission free to purchase the largest timbers of the Baltic, which were so urgently needed for the work of reconstruction. (5)

Thus it will be observed that England was unable to furbish her sea power from internal sources, but had to look to the Baltic countries.

In 1658 in the Sound, the narrow Channel leading from Kattegat to the Baltic a Dutch fleet under Obdam fought and won a hotly contested action against a Swedish fleet under Wrangel. The battle was significant of the length to which the maritime powers were prepared to go to maintain free access to the Baltic. For centuries a primary source of naval stores, the Baltic was as essential to the economy of northern Europe as was the Mediterranean to that of the south. Apart from wood, the materials used to equip a man-of-war of the sailing era included hemp, canvas, iron, pitch, tar, tallow, resin, oil and brimstone. These essentials came wholly or in part from the Baltic, and for some of them the Baltic countries were the only accessible suppliers. A growing merchant marine also made inroads into the homegrown resources and increased the imports and the need for imports from the Baltic.

As has been remarked (6) Baltic timber was particularly important to those maritime countries without great forests whilst the importance of their carrying trade to the Baltic ports justified the risk and expense they incurred to safeguard their interests. Winter closed the Baltic for half the year, so total closure, as a result of political power, could not be tolerated by the maritime nations. It was indeed fortunate for those nations that the countries of Scandinavia never could agree consistently to combine to make the Baltic a sea over which they could exercise undisputed control. Had they done so, they could have held much of Europe to ransom. Nevertheless, between 1658 and 1814, on nearly twenty occasions England found it necessary to send a fleet to the Sound to keep this vital trade open. (7)

As settlement in North America developed, so the West Country traders and shipwrights had sought enlarged opportunities in New England and built ships for sale as well as local use. By 1770 it was commonly estimated that one third of British shipping was colonial built. On their delivery voyage these were freighted with plank and spars for British yards. In the eighteenth century the best and largest masts came from Baltic, Norwegian and New England sources in that order. In 1807, 17,000 masts and spars various were brought from Russian and Prussian ports. After the

treaty of Tilsit (7th July 1807) this fell to 4,600. The Quebec totals for these years were 2,750 and 23,000 respectively. (8)

FRENCH LURKING IN PACIFIC

I trust that the foregoing statements have made clear the reason for Cook's delight at the discovery of an island abounding in potential naval stores. On Cook's authority also, it was known that suitable ship's timber and a strong flax could be procured in New Zealand. The English were not the only nation to appreciate the possibilities of the future dominion. In 1769, while Cook had been making his first circumnavigation of New Zealand, the French Navigator, de Surville, anchored in Doubtless Bay to rest his scurvy-stricken crew; but their ill-treatment of the Maoris compelled a hasty departure. Three years later when Marion du Fresne was looking for timber and water in New Zealand he and several of his crew were massacred by Maoris. Crozet, his second in command, wrought a merciless revenge and took formal possession of "La France australe". It was an empty gesture which did not deter others from similar pretentions towards New Zealand. (9)

When Cook left Norfolk Island on 11th October, 1774 he sailed directly to Queen Charlotte Sound in New Zealand. After a brief sojourn there he made his third and last ice-edge cruise into the Antarctic regions.

Early in 1775, when *Resolution* was sailing through unknown waters in the South Atlantic ocean, the carpenters set to work to convert the pine cut at Norfolk Island into a top-gallant-mast. It was knotty, and no doubt still unseasoned, for it seems to have been rejected quickly. Clerke, the second lieutenant, commented dryly: "Carpenters converting the Mast of ye Sloop we have in store into a Main Top Gallant Mast — the Norfolk Island spar proving but indifferent". (10)

After 1763 England began to enjoy the gains, territorial and otherwise, of the Seven Years War. English merchants could venture into the orient with comparative impunity and after Cook had unshrouded the mysteries of much of the Pacific the wealth of that great ocean and the lands surrounding it drew the English like a magnet. Whaling, sealing, fur trading, English command of the China trade were all prizes that Cook's explorations and meticulous chart work gave to his nation to use and exploit. As the American Colonies were in the process of being lost another empire was being gained.

Which brings us to the great controversy.

With the loss of the American colonies, the need to find alternative accommodation for convicts evoked suggestions for a penal settlement from Sir Joseph Banks in 1779 and four years later

from another of Cook's former shipmates, James Maria Matra. To strengthen his argument for settlement of New Holland with exiled United Empire loyalists as well as convicts, Matra stressed the possibilities of a useful connection being made with New Zealand which, since it was within a fortnight's sail of Botany Bay, might supply the colonies with flax and because of its superior timber become indeed a valuable source of naval supplies. (11)

Every potential colony was then so advertised, e.g. Canada, but it all went to show the English preoccupation, as a maritime power, with adequate sources and supplies of the all-important naval stores.

LOOKING TO NEW ZEALAND

In 1784 members of the House of Commons enquired whether New Zealand might not be suitable for a penal colony. The forbidding reputation of the Maoris spared New Zealand such a fate; subsequent discussion was confined to its use as an economic adjunct to a possible penal settlement in New Holland. To this end Admiral Sir George Young submitted a plan for the settlement of New South Wales, in which he strongly advocated the growth and cultivation of New Zealand flax. (12) Such a suggestion, even though the English government had not made up its mind on the question of a convict settlement in New South Wales, did not go unheeded. Lord Sydney, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, was favourably enough impressed with the reports on New Zealand flax and timber to suggest that they be procured for the British naval squadron in India and incorporated these views in his plan of transportation to Botany Bay. (13) Moreover, convict ships would not need to return to England in ballast, for they could call at New Zealand for cargoes of flax and spars.

Yet, did men like Pitt, Dundas, Hawkesbury and Sydney see the new colony merely as a "dumping ground", a "receptacle for social refuse". They were intelligent and practical men, faced with urgent tasks of applying limited national resources to diverse ends. They knew that any community, once established, is an organic thing with an inherent capacity to grow or decline to become something quite different from what its founders intended. It might even rebel and defect to enemies as colonies of other states had done.

Therefore there was associated with Botany Bay, from the first conceptual plan onward, a hierarchy with a judicial body, a church and means for organised defence. There was a certainty that traders, British or foreign, would visit it. This is shown by Phillip's designation of a Neutral Bay in Port Jackson. It is shown in the coat of arms — a bale of goods, a ship, distaff, plough and a church.

The motto "Sic fortis Etruria crevit" shows expectation of growth and prosperity, hardly consistent with a purely penal colony. (14)

There is no doubt that the practical men at the Admiralty, while welcoming any alternative source of naval stores, would have recognised the limitations of Norfolk Island on account of its small area (15 square miles) and, more importantly, its lack of safe all-weather anchorages.

The decision to settle New South Wales came from the urgent need to have a base of operations in eastern seas prompted by the knowledge that the French, in their next tussle with the English, would again seek to take over the Dutch settlements at the Cape of Good Hope and in the East Indies. Also the route through the East Indies was fraught with navigational dangers and infested with pirates. The trans-Pacific route to China was too long, but a port of refreshment with a safe haven on the coast of New South Wales made the China voyage feasible and reasonably danger free, from either east or west.

DEPARTURE OF FIRST FLEET

The sailing of La Perouse in 1785 served to hasten matters in England and the First Fleet got under way in 1787. That Phillip had doubts about Botany Bay is evidenced by his attempt to get there ahead of the rest of the fleet to examine it. His examination of Port Jackson resolved all doubts. He "had the satisfaction of finding the finest harbour in the world, in which a thousand sail of the line may ride in the most perfect security". (15)

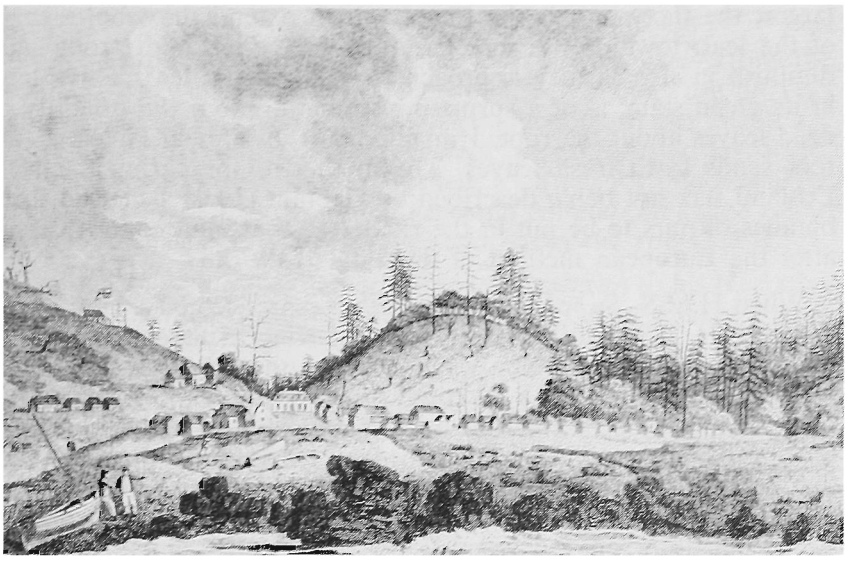
Yet on 24th January, 1788 two sails had appeared off Botany Bay under French colours, and anchored there — the Boussole and the Astrolabe. La Perouse had arrived after a virtual circumnavigation of the Pacific. More disturbing he had anchored off Norfolk Island, but could not land on account of the surf. Now, a competent naval officer with instructions, "as soon as circumstances will admit of it, to send a small establishment thither to secure the same to us, and prevent it being occupied by the subjects of any other European power" (16) was not going to leave Norfolk Island untenanted. How embarrassing it would have been to launch a settlement on the coast of New South Wales and have the French almost simultaneously settle on the front doorstep at Norfolk Island. The government set some store on Norfolk Island in spite of its lack of basic qualities for any settlement at all. Thus on 14th February, 1788, *Supply* sailed for Norfolk Island, with Philip Gidley King, second lieutenant of His Majesty's ship *Sirius* for the purpose of settling that island. He only carried with him a petty officer, surgeon's mate, two marines, two men who understood the cultivation of flax, with nine men and six women

convicts". (17) The number of initial settlers is wrongly given as twenty-one (apart from King). The correct details are, in addition to Lieutenant King, James Cunningham, master's mate; Thomas Jamison, surgeon's mate; John Altree, assistant to the surgeon; Roger Morley, weaver; two seamen, two marines and nine male and six female convicts. (18)

THE FIRST ASSESSMENT

The first report from Norfolk Island — "Lieutenant Ball, who commands the *Supply*, arrived the 19th of March. He made Norfolk Island on the 29th of February, and was five days before a place could be found at which it was possible to land the provisions, and saw very few places at which it was possible to land a man, so completely do the rocks surround that island. They succeeded, however, having found a small opening in a reef that runs across a bay that is at the south end of the island, and the six months' provisions were all safely landed. Lieut. King describes this island as one intire wood, without a single acre of clear land that had been found when the *Supply* left them, and says that the pine trees rise fifty feet and sixty feet before they shoot out any branches. There are several kinds of timber on the island, which as far as he could examine it, was a rich black mould, with great quantities of pumice-stone. The trees are so bound together by a kind of supplejack that the penetrating into the interior parts of the island was very difficult. Several good springs of water were found, and I apprehend His Majesty's ships in the East Indies may be supplied from this island with masts and yards, which will render it a very valuable acquisition. The cultivation of the flax-plant will be attended to when people can be sent to clear the ground". (19)

King's journal has much to say of the size of the pine trees and the supple-jack or vine intermeshed with groves of pines rendering them impenetrable unless the men cut their way through. He remarked on the large kind of iris growing on the sides of the cliff at Anson's Bay; a plant strong enough to support their weight when in their endeavours to get down into the bay they nearly fell down a 90 foot cliff. During this excursion King "did not see a leaf of flax or any herb whatever; the ground, although a rich deep soil, being quite bare, which is rather extraordinary, as Captain Cook says that the flax plant is rather more luxuriant here than at New Zealand". At last King found a place where *Supply* could be brought in and safely anchored. This was a bay on the south side of the island where the shore close to the beach was covered with a long kind of iris, within which was an impenetrable forest. (20)



View of Sydney, on the south side of Norfolk Island. (Published in "An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales", Vol. 1, D. Collins, London 1798).

After the return to Sydney of *Supply*, Watkin Tench recorded of Norfolk Island — "The pine trees growing there are described to be of a growth and height superior, perhaps, to any in the world. But the difficulty of bringing them away will not be easily surmounted, from the badness and danger of the landing place. After the most exact search not a single plant of the New Zealand flax could be found, though we had been taught to believe it abounded there". (21) This statement was a manifest error, but Tench again adverted to it in the closing chapter of his Expedition to Botany Bay, the manuscript of which was en route to England for printing by July 1788 — "The New Zealand hemp, of which so many sanguine expectations were formed, is not a native of the soil; and Norfolk Island, where we made sure to find this article, is also without it". (22)

ABUNDANCE OF FLAX

In the meantime King's journal says "The surgeon in walking about the island, found out the flax-plant, which proved to be what we had hitherto called the iris. Not having any description of this plant, I had no idea of its being what Captain Cook calls the flax-plant of New Zealand; the cliffs and shore near the settlement were covered with it. Its root is bulbous, and eight leaves issue

from it, which are, in general, five or six feet in length, and about four inches broad, close to the root. The plant bears a great resemblance to the iris, except that the leaves are much thicker and larger; the flaxy part is the fibres, which extend the whole length of the leaf; towards the root they are very thick and strong, and diminish in size as they approach the end of the leaf. This plant, in its green state, is of a surprising strength. From the quantity of dead leaves about the root, I imagine it is an annual, and that the root sends forth fresh leaves. The method of preparing the New Zealand flax not being described by Captain Cook, I caused three bundles of ours to be put in the rivulet to soak, intending to try it after the European method of dressing flax". (23)

When H.M.S. *Supply* brought further stores from Sydney at the end of July 1788 Phillip's despatches to King included a questionnaire, the answers to which were intended to enable the Governor to assess Norfolk Island's potential based on the experience gained from five months occupation by King and his party. There were seventeen queries. They were aimed at ascertaining the ability of the island to support the people already there. King considered that in two years he would have more than enough grain with animal food depending on the supply and breeding of stock. Clothing would be available on the flax plant being brought to work. King thought with twenty more men and women in proportion he would make more progress in clearing and cultivating the ground and these could be self supporting in the same time as the original group. He already had 2½ acres in barley and one acre in garden ground. By September he expected to have an acre in Indian corn and rice. No clear ground was available on the island. Great numbers of fish were to be had from the waters around the island.

In reply to a question as to whether he had discovered the flax plant King replied in the affirmative and that the bundles of flax plant he had put into water on 17th March and taken up on 27th July were found, although the thick vegetable of the fibre had rotted away, to be covered still with a hard woody substance from which they had tried ineffectually to separate the flaxy part. This last King had no doubt would make good cordage, canvas and linen as it appears to be of a fine and strong texture. Some lines were made of it which were tolerably strong and good; but the want of a method to separate the woody part from the flax would be a great hindrance to its being made useful.

LACK OF SAFE ANCHORAGES

King had to concede that the island had no safe year round anchorages, but he pointed out he had to experience yet the weather the summer months would bring. This applied also to the loading

of spars for ships of the line. However, King thought vessels might be launched and built in Ball Bay and when the flax plant can be brought to work, cordage and sails can be made of the finest and strongest sort.

He reported that apart from the loss of five ewes from the scab and two sows poisoned the rest of his livestock "are all very thriving and likely to do well". The productions of the island are timber for the construction of vessels, pines for masting them, and when the flax plant can be worked, a sufficiency of cordage for the navy of Great Britain, which needs no cultivation, as the island abounds with it, and fresh leaves shoot from the roots. (24)

On 1st October, 1788 Tench penned a postscript to his Narrative of an Expedition to Botany Bay. He reports that accounts from Norfolk Island are more favourable than were expected. "The soil proves admirably adapted to produce all kinds of grain, and European vegetables. But the discovery which constitutes its value is the New Zealand flax, plants of which are found growing in every part of the island in the utmost luxuriancy and abundance. This will, beyond doubt, appear strange to the reader after what has been related in the former part of my work: and in future, let the credit of the testimony be as high as it may, I shall never without diffidence and hesitation presume to contradict the narrations of Mr. Cook. The truth is, that those sent to settle and explore the island knew not the form in which the plant grows, and were unfurnished with every particular which could lead to a knowledge of it. Unaccountable as this may sound, it is, nevertheless, incontestably true. Captain Ball brought away with him several specimens for inspection, and, on trial, by some flax-dressers among us, the threads produced from them, though course, are pronounced to be stronger, more likely to be durable, and fitter for every purpose of manufacturing cordage, than any they ever before dressed. Every research has been made by those on the island to find a landing-place, whence it might be practicable to ship off the timber growing there, but hitherto none has been discovered". (25)

Phillip's despatch of 28th September, 1788 (No. 7) to Lord Sydney refers to the inability of the flax dresser to prepare the phormium tenax "as this plant requires a different treatment in the dressing to what the European flax plant does". He asks Sydney to order proper persons to be sent out, by which means Norfolk Island will, in a very short time, be able to furnish a considerable quantity of flax. The pine trees in the opinion of the carpenter of the *Supply* are superior to any ever seen by him, and the island affords excellent timber for ship-building, as well as for masts and yards with which the King's ships in the East Indies may be supplied, as likewise with pitch and tar. The only difficulty

in Phillip's view is the lack of a good landing place. If one cannot be found in one of the small bays Lieutenant King had put forward a proposal to blow a passage through the reef. If this fails also the master of the *Supply* had assured Phillip there will be no danger in summer time; it would be safer for a ship to load masts and spars at Norfolk Island than it is in Riga Bay, where so many ships load yearly. (26)

In October, 1788 Phillip sent the transport *Golden Grove* to Norfolk Island with eighteen months' provisions and stores and an additional 42 persons. These were landed on 15th October and the augmented population of the island, allowing for deaths in the original party, rose to 62 persons. (27)

By March, 1790 the anxiety engendered by the failure of storeships to arrive from England caused Phillip to take such steps as to him appeared best calculated to provide for the immediate support of the people in his charge. The goodness of the soil on Norfolk Island, and the industry of those employed there, rendered that island a resource and the only one that offered when the lapse of time gave him reason to suppose that some accident had happened to the storeships sent out from England. On 6th March *Sirius* and *Supply* sailed for Norfolk Island with a detachment of 65 officers and men, 5 women and children from the detachment and civil department, one hundred and sixteen male and sixty-seven female convicts with 27 children. Such a number of people, it was anticipated, would relieve the pressure on the limited resources of Sydney Cove to maintain the inhabitants remaining at the main settlement while the richness of Norfolk Island's natural resources — good soil, bird life and fish — should adequately support those sent there. (28)

LOSS OF SIRIUS

On 5th April, 1790 *Supply* returned to Sydney Cove with Hunter's account of the loss of *Sirius* in Sydney Bay on 19th March; there had been no loss of life and there was every prospect of saving the bulk of the provisions and stores with which she was laden. Yet it was a disaster of no small magnitude; *Sirius* was the settlements' only ship of force and, with *Supply*, the only means of communication with the outside world for provisions. One ship lost meant, that in the absence of the other, the settlement had no means of communication with Norfolk Island or anywhere else.

Hunter and most of the ship's company of *Sirius* perforce had to remain on Norfolk Island until Phillip could arrange a ship to take them off. King had been replaced at Norfolk Island by Major Ross (the official Lieutenant Governor) as Phillip wanted King to

take despatches to England and verbally report such information as could not be conveyed by letter. Ross had been a perpetual thorn in Phillip's side and the chance to send him to Norfolk Island without loss of face must have been too good to be missed. (29)

Immediately the *Sirius* was lost Ross put the island under martial law. A wise precaution as out of the 506 persons on the island 291 were adult convicts. Without martial law the commission of any offence subject to criminal trial resulted in the offender having to be sent to Sydney for this purpose. Now the offender could be dealt with on the spot — as Hunter observes "much mischief I am of opinion was prevented . . . for during the whole time of its existence, we had but once occasion to put it in force". (30)

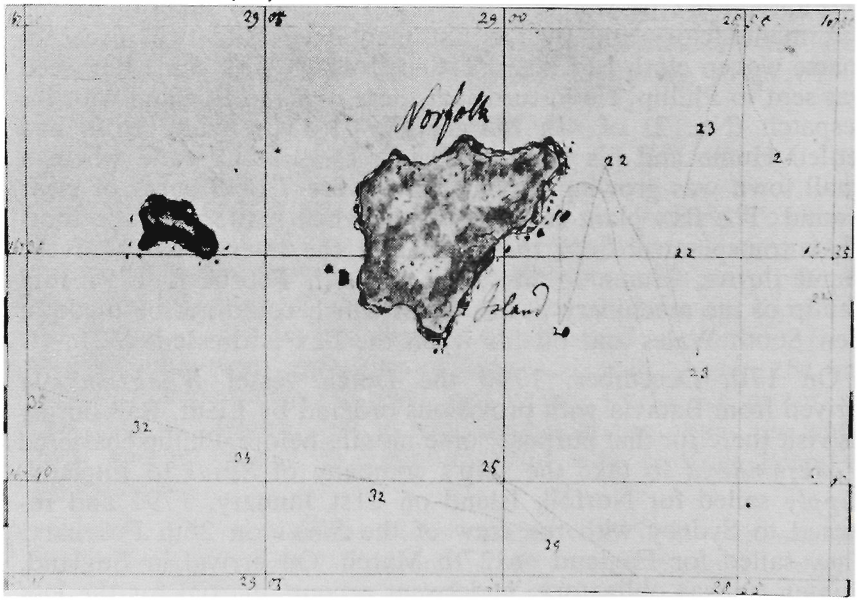
Despite expectations, crops on the island were poor on account of the depredations of grubs and caterpillars; a reduced ration was imposed. Yet providentially famine was averted by the presence of immense numbers of birds (puffins) [a species of petrel, pterodroma melanopus] from April to early August 1790. These birds and their eggs supplied the settlement with animal food and no beef or pork was issued from the store for some time. (31)

A Mr. Andrew Hume, originally sent out as a superintendent of convicts in the ill fated H.M.S. *Guardian*, after her near loss as a result of collision with an iceberg, was transferred to the transport *Neptune* and arrived at Sydney Cove with the second fleet on 28th June, 1790. At some stage between then and 11th February, 1791 he was sent to Norfolk Island to superintend the flax manufactory and by the last mentioned date two pieces of coarse woven cloth had been produced which with some flax seed was sent to Phillip. He in turn sent these items to England with his despatch (No. 2) of 4th March, 1791 to Grenville. Ross had settled Hume and his band of flax-dressers at Cascade where a small town was growing up and there were 7 or 8 acres of clear ground. The flax plant seed grew well when scattered while roots when transplanted from the seaside to the interior parts of the island throve. Hume in his letter of 10th February, 1791 told Phillip of the machinery needs; items which could not be made in New South Wales and oil for when the flax is dressed. (32)

On 17th December, 1790 the Dutch vessel *Waaksamheyd* arrived from Batavia with provisions ordered by Lieut. Ball during his visit there for that purpose some months before. Phillip chartered *Waaksamheyd* to take the ship's company of *Sirius* to England. *Supply* sailed for Norfolk Island on 21st January, 1791 and returned to Sydney with the crew of the *Sirius* on 26th February. They sailed for England on 27th March. On arrival in England, Hunter, as was obligatory, underwent a court martial for the loss of *Sirius* but was honourably acquitted. (33)

ADVERSE REPORTS ON TIMBER

In his Historical Journal, Hunter published two accounts of the Norfolk Island Pines (King's (1790) and his own (1791)) which effectively destroyed the hopes of Norfolk Island being a source of supply for ships' masts and spars. King said "there are only five sorts of trees on the island which can be called timber; viz. the pine, a wood resembling the live oak; a yellow wood; a hard black wood; and a wood resembling the English beech. The pine-trees are of a great size, many of them being from one hundred and eighty to two hundred and twenty feet high, and from four to eight feet in diameter some distance from the ground. Those trees, which measure from one hundred to one hundred and eighty feet high, are in general sound, and are without branches for eighty or ninety feet, but the upper part is too knotty and hard to be useful; indeed, it frequently happens, that after twenty feet have been cut off from the butt, the trees become rotten and shaky, and are also very brittle; for which reason, no dependence can be put on them for masts or yards. The turpentine which exudes freely from the bark, is of a milk-white glutinous substance; but it is rather remarkable, that there is none in the timber. We tried to render this turpentine useful in paying boats, and other purposes, but without success; as it would neither melt nor burn; we also tried to make pitch or tar, by burning the old pines; but there being no turpentine in the wood, our efforts were useless . . . The branches of the live-oak are fit for timbers and knees of boats or small vessels". (34)



Hunter said "it [Norfolk Island] is very thickly covered with wood, of which there are six or seven different kinds, and some I believe might be applied for naval purposes. The Pines, which has been particularly spoken of by Captain Cook, and by others, who have lately visited this island, is the most conspicuous of any tree here; they grow to a prodigious size, and are proportionably tall, being from 150 to 200 feet, and in circumference from 12 to 14 feet, some to 28 and 30 feet. These trees, from their immense height, have a very noble appearance, being in general very straight, and free from branches, to 40, sometimes 60 feet, above the ground; they have been by some thought fit for masts, for ships of any size; in length and diameter they certainly are, but with respect to quality they are, in my opinion, wholly unfit; even admitting them to be sound, which, from experience, I know is seldom the case. I employed the carpenters of the *Sirius*, while here, to cut down a few sticks, which it was intended should be sent home by the first opportunity, in order for trial in his Majesty's dock-yards, to see if they were, as had been said, fit for his Majesty's navy, or not. In providing a top-mast, and a top-sail-yard for a seventy-four gun ship, a thirty-two, a twenty, or a sloop, and one rough spar, in all seven sticks, 34 trees were cut down, 27 of which were found to be defective. When these trees were falling, it was observed that most of them discharged a considerable quantity of clear water, which continued to flow at every fresh cut of the axe; there is no turpentine in these trees but what circulates between the bark and body of the tree, and which is soluble in water. It is a very short grained and spongy kind of timber, and I think fit only for house-building, for which we know it to be very useful. When fresh cut down, five out of six will sink in water, the wood is so exceedingly heavy; and, if we suppose for a moment, that great part of the pine timber were fit for naval purposes, the great difficulty, and indeed I may say impossibly, of getting it from the interior parts of the island to the sea, would render it of little value, if designed for masts; but if for plank, it could be cut up where fallen. Those which grow on the south-east point of the island, where the land is low, are those which have hitherto been made use of". (35)

The ship's company of *Sirius* during their stay on the island had been utilised for public works such as removing rocks which obstructed the passage through the reef at Sydney Bay. Lieutenant William Bradley, the first lieutenant of *Sirius*, made a survey of the island. (36)

Although the Norfolk pines were not suitable for ship of the line masts and spars, with other native woods they were still suitable for timbers and spars of much smaller vessels. Two cobles, flat floored, square sterned boats usually fitted with a dipping

lugsail were constructed and a further one was being built by February 1791. (37) ,

APPOINTMENT OF KING

Lieutenant P. G. King whilst in London was promoted (Phillip's good offices and recommendations did not go unheeded) to master and command. Better still he was given a commission as Lieutenant-Governor of Norfolk Island at a salary of £250/-/- per annum. (38) He took up his post in November 1791, having come to Sydney in H.M.S. *Gorgon* (Captain John Parker) as passenger and sailed thence in the chartered transport *Atlantic* for Norfolk Island on 26th October, 1791. (39)

The population of the island increased steadily as further prisoners, guards and settlers were sent in. By 11th February, 1791 the initial establishment of 24 (including Lieut. King the commandant) had increased to 627. By September, 1792 King reported "the whole number of souls on the island is 1,115". (40)

It did not, however, fulfil the agricultural promise of its rich soil. The inroads of animal and insect pests, present from the start of agriculture on the island, and the uncertainty of regular rainfall continued to make it impossible to rely on the bumper harvests that each year should have brought. Thus the story of Norfolk Island during the first phase is a long succession of shortages of vital supplies and the necessity to furnish stores at government expense. (41)

Landing facilities at Sydney Bay on the south side of the island having been improved as already mentioned King turned his attention to the north side of the island and with great labour had landing facilities provided at Cascade Bay. He had "removed every obstacle respecting landing safely and conveniently on this island, which now can be always easily effected either in Sydney or Cascade Bay, as they reciprocally become the lee side of the island'". (42) It must be noted that the facilities were for lighters and small craft only. Any ship of size still had to stand off shore and send in her cargo by her boats.

In September, 1792 King informed Phillip — "I am sorry to say that no amendment is made in manufacturing the flax of this island. I am confident that a native of New Zealand would in a short time enable us to make a great progress in cloathing; but 'till then I fear we shall not be able to improve on the pattern now sent. Your Excellency may depend on my doing my utmost to promote that, as well as every other improvement". (43)

King offered £100 to the master of the whaler *William and Ann* (the well known Captain Ebor Bunker) if he managed to bring back two New Zealanders from a whaling cruise off the islands;

but, unable to persuade any to accompany him, Captain Bunker did not return. Some months later, because of King's insistent pleas, Henry Dundas, directed the Admiralty to instruct Vancouver, who was on a voyage of discovery to the south-west coast of America, to procure two New Zealanders and send them to Norfolk Island. The storeship *Daedalus* conveyed this instruction to Vancouver when it brought him supplies from England. Under Vancouver's instructions, Lieutenant James Hanson who was placed in *Daedalus* as naval agent sailed for New South Wales gathering livestock at Monterey and Tahiti. En route from Tahiti to Sydney he called at the Bay of Islands, where early in 1793 he inveigled two young Maoris aboard. To their surprise they found they were not intended, as normally happened to captives in their homeland, to be eaten. On arrival in Sydney they were treated with every courtesy, transhipped to the *Shah Hormuzear* which sailed, with stores for Norfolk Island, on 24th April, 1793. To reassure the Maoris, Lieutenant Hanson stayed with them until the ship was actually outside Sydney Heads. Not until they arrived at Norfolk Island was it discovered that the work of flax dressing was done chiefly by women and that the two kidnapped New Zealanders, one a priest and the other a warrior, knew little of the process. Yet, they taught the people assigned to the flax manufactory what they knew with the result that even with bad materials a few hands could manufacture thirty yards of "good" canvas in a week. At the end of six months King returned them as promised to New Zealand. As he wanted to see them returned safely and also wanted to learn something of their country at first-hand King "borrowed" the whaler cum store-ship *Britannia* (Captain William Raven) then under charter to Bengal for supplies for New South Wales. King sailed for New Zealand from Norfolk Island on 8th November, 1793. He returned on 18th November with his mission accomplished. During his ten days' absence, he had left the government of the island in charge of Captain Nepean. He was strongly censured for leaving his government and taking the Maoris back to New Zealand, by Lieutenant-Governor Grose in a despatch of 25th February, 1794. King had sent a despatch to Dundas dated 19th November, 1793 and two letters dated 19th March, 1794 which last apparently accompanied a despatch from Grose to Dundas dated 29th April, 1794. The Duke of Portland, who had replaced Dundas, in a despatch to Governor Hunter dated 10th June, 1795 considered that King's only fault lay in his quitting his government and departing with the New Zealanders in the *Britannia* without previous communication with Lieutenant-Governor Grose. (44)

FIRST OPEN DOUBTS

Grose, in a despatch to Dundas dated 5th July, 1794, expressed the disadvantages of Norfolk Island. He was the first official to openly

express doubts of the utility of the island. He said "The *Daedalus*, being refitted, is loading for Norfolk Island with such stores and provisions as are wanting. The danger in this passage of losing both the ship and her cargo is a business always to be dreaded. I never discovered the advantages proposed from possession of the island; there is not herbage sufficient to feed cattle of any description, consequently the probability of the inhabitants being ever able to maintain themselves is out of the question. The progress of this settlement [New South Wales] has been greatly interrupted by sending working people there whose labour could have been better employed here, and sooner or later some unpleasant consequence, will certainly attend the conveyance of supplies to it". (45)

When David Collins sailed for England in the *Britannia* on 29th September, 1796 in company with H.M.S. *Reliance* and the colonial schooner *Francis* a call was made at Norfolk Island to embark Lieutenant-Governor King and his family, who were returning to England. On 25th October all ships sailed from Norfolk, the *Francis* returning to Sydney with King's despatches to Hunter. King had suffered bad health and Hunter had consented to his return to England. From personal observation and conversations with King, Collins concluded the first volume of his Account of the English Colony in New South Wales with a full account of Norfolk Island from March 1788 to October 1796. He deals with the proliferation of sheep, goats and swine, the bumper grain crops of the periods May 1793 to May 1796 and the availability of good limestone for building purposes. Finally the state of the flax manufactory is examined. The flax plant (phormium tenax) is so prolific no cultivation is needed. In its wild state it is barely inferior to plants experimentally cultivated. Since the visit of the two New Zealanders in 1793, although they did not know enough to give full instruction on the manufacture of the flax, there had been an improvement in production. Yet, it was not possible to manufacture more than a limited quantity of canvas and other hempen products because of a sad lack of machinery and indispensable tools. The numbers employed and the categories of employment were as follows:—

Invalids gathering the flax	3 men
Preparing it	7 women
Beating and washing it	3 invalids
Flax-dresser	1
Spinners	2 women
Weaver and assistant	2 men
TOTAL	18

Their weekly labour produced 16 yards of canvas of the size of No. 7. A hardly inspiring total in the light of the then current needs of the Royal Navy — some 10,000 tons per annum of hemp. (46) At the time of King's departure the population of the island numbered 887. (47)

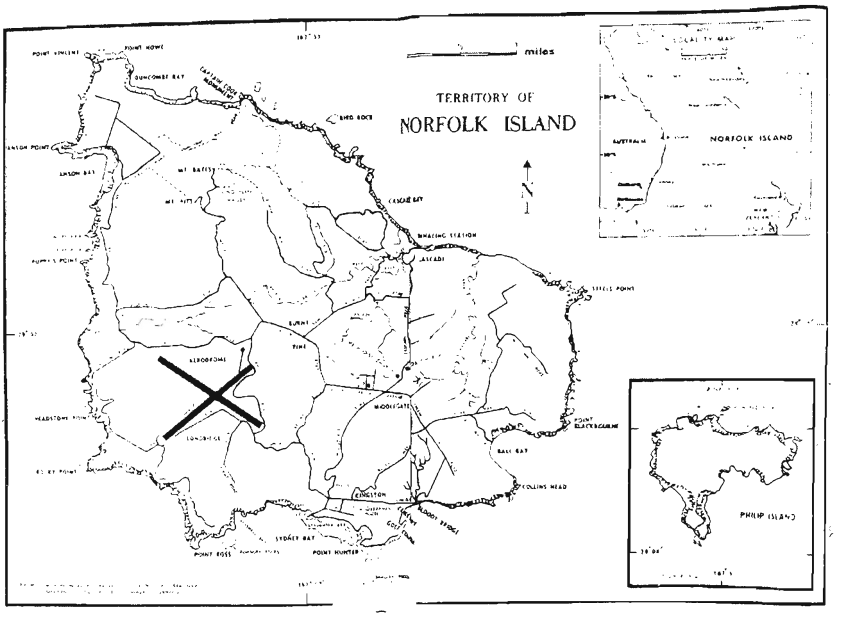
TOWNSON SUCCEEDS KING

King was succeeded at Norfolk Island by Captain John Townson of the New South Wales Corps. Townson had served as a Lieutenant at the island. The returns of troops made on 13th December, 1791 and 14th June, 1795 show him at that post. Officially he was acting Lieutenant-Governor at Norfolk Island from King's departure until he was relieved by Captain Rowley in November, 1799. (48)

Bad crops and paucity of communication with Sydney gave occasion to Captain Townson in the first half of 1798 to build a decked boat in which to forward his letters to Governor Hunter. The boat described variously as being of 16 tons or 25 tons burthen was the sloop *Norfolk*, immortalised by Bass and Flinders use of her in the circumnavigation of Tasmania and Flinders' later voyage to Moreton Bay. (49)

On 26th April, 1799 *Norfolk* returned to Sydney from Norfolk Island with the news that the maize harvest there had entirely failed, owing to the long drought which had prevailed there. This led David Collins to assert that "Every year's experience proved, that this island never would be of the utility which might be expected from the very great expense that was incurred on its account. It was probable, that this expense had not been adverted to in England; for all the bills drawn there were sent to New South Wales to be consolidated into bills upon the treasury; by which means the expenses of the principal settlement appeared to be far more than in fact they were". Collins considered that Norfolk Island was fit only for a purely penal establishment which would be far less costly. In all probability "Van Diemen's Island" would be a more advantageous spot for a settlement and but for the expense already incurred it would be advisable to remove the whole Norfolk Island settlement thither. (50)

One cannot help but wonder whether Collins had the gift of prophecy or whether as the Lieutenant-Governor designate of the southern settlement he hoped for a pool of experienced settlers from Norfolk Island. On 24th June, 1803 Lord Hobart in a despatch to P. G. King stated "Upon a mature consideration of all circumstances relating to the establishment upon Norfolk Island, its great expense and the disadvantages attending a communication



Modern map of the Island, from one prepared by the Department of National Development, Canberra. (From "Norfolk Island — An Outline of its History", by Merval Hoare 1969).

between that island and Port Jackson, not merely from the intermediate distance, but from the danger of approaching the island, except in the summer season, from the want of a port or even safe anchorage, it appears advisable that a part of the establishment now at Norfolk Island should be removed, together with a proportion of the settlers and convicts, to Port Dalrymple, the advantageous position of which upon the southern (sic) coast of Van Diemen's Land, and near the eastern entrance of Bass' Streights, renders it in a political view peculiarly necessary that a settlement should be formed there". The settlers and their livestock were to be removed at public expense and were to receive compensation by way of land grants, money and clothing and rations and assigned labour for the first twelve months of their re-settlement. (51) Because of the geographical confusion King, Paterson and Johnston had to confer and King reported to Hobart he was sending Paterson to examine Port Dalrymple, Port Phillip and Western Port to fix on the best situation for re-settlement of the Norfolk Islanders. (52)

FINAL STAGES BEGIN

There appears no need to go into great detail about the final stages of the first phase of Norfolk Island settlement. As was to be expected, King as the founding father voiced his concern and protest. (53)

This did not do more than delay the running down process. In July 1804 the total population of the island was 1084. (54) On 20th July, 1804 King issued a general order for the removal of some settlers from the island and sent Foveaux a lengthy despatch of the same date on this subject (55), but it was not until 8th January, 1805 that a further general order indicated that the *Investigator* (extensively rebuilt and reduced in tonnage) would call at Norfolk Island to remove the first of the settlers who had elected to re-settle in Van Diemen's Land. (56) It seems that at last a reduction in establishment and removal of settlers was commenced on 12th February, 1805 as by 30th June, 1805 the population had dropped to 712 (57). On 15th March, 1806, in a despatch to Lord Camden, King again urged the retention of a small settlement at Norfolk Island for the purpose of affording supplies to English whaling ships and salting pork for other settlements (58). By 12th August, 1806 the population was further reduced to 694 (59), yet on 31st December, 1807 Castlereagh instructed Bligh (who had now succeeded King) to keep a small establishment at Norfolk Island to supply South Sea whalers and, occasionally, Port Jackson and to promote the culture of the coffee plant introduced by Foveaux. (60). The muster of 30th September, 1807 shows the population of Norfolk Island as at 17th June, 1807 totalled 820 — an increase (61). After the deposing of Bligh on 26th January, 1808, Johnston busied himself with the continued evacuation of the island which had been proceeding during Bligh's administration. On 21st October, 1808 Foveaux informed Under Secretary Cooke that on 30th September, 1808 there remained only 250 people on Norfolk Island. (62) Johnston's mass evacuation of so many people of whom some 250 were sent to the Derwent threw a strain on the resources at that place and they were, to quote Bligh, "left . . . in a state of wretchedness, almost naked". (63) Macquarie continued the evacuation and a further 145 persons were removed in the *Minstrel* and *Lady Nelson*. These vessels conveyed their passengers to Port Dalrymple where the last of them were landed on 4th March, 1813 and settled on Norfolk Plains on the South Esk River, an area Macquarie had settled for them. (64) Then on 15th February, 1814 H.M. brig *Kangaroo* arrived at Norfolk Island to complete the evacuation. After all livestock that could be caught had been killed and salted down, all provisions and stores put on board and all the buildings destroyed by fire *Kangaroo* sailed on 28th February for Sydney and arrived there on 10th March. (65) The closure of the first Norfolk Island settlement was accomplished at length.

I have not studied the penal side of the first settlement in any depth; there were the usual good and bad aspects, but they are hardly relevant to the main line of my enquiry.

I must revert to my first query; what were the intentions of the British government? Phillip may have known but kept his own counsel.

That there is still some uncertainty on the subject seems evident, and the real motives of the decision to use the east coast of New Holland for a settlement were probably mixed. The convict receptacle idea has been taken at large at face value. It was certainly not without importance and perhaps the catalyst. Yet, the early "plan" of Sir George Young (and plans from others such as Matra and Sir Joseph Banks) had stressed the commercial possibilities of a settlement at Botany Bay. Phillip's instructions and other sources testify to the hopes of timber and flax for naval purposes, to replace those of North America. The importance of these commodities to an eighteenth century maritime power cannot be stressed too much. K. M. Dallas, whose work "Trading Posts or Penal Colonies" has been referred to, is adamant that a settlement on the east coast of Australia is entirely compatible with the growing mercantilism of the era. Such ideas cannot be excluded, even if they were not publicly announced. The slow development of the mercantile aspect was due to the opposition of the monolithic East India Company rather than to planned exclusion. That this opposition was largely overcome and in fact legislated away by the English parliament within 25 years of the foundation of Sydney has been dealt with at some length in my papers on the early whaling and sealing industries of Australia (66) when wealth was being won from the sea before our present great primary industries had got beyond a subsistence level of production.

Norfolk Island had been reported to be a rich source of timber and flax. In view of the fact that a settlement was to be founded in the vicinity, why not try to exploit it? Again, French pretensions in the Pacific could not go un-noticed. Though defeated in the Seven Years War they were a resilient people who might yet secure bases at strategic points on the new trade routes which had been or were being opened up by the explorations of Cook and his successors.

Commercially Norfolk Island turned out a failure and, I consider, that is why it was abandoned in 1814. Later, however, when a gaol, splendidly isolated and escape-proof, was required for the incorrigible villain, Norfolk Island was remembered and used.

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(46) *Ibid.* p. 590.
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(53) *Ibid.* pp. 366-367.
(54) H.R.A. I, V, p. 40.
(55) *Ibid.* pp. 24-32 and 88-89.
(56) *Ibid.* pp. 132-133, 213 and 279.
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